

## Frequently asked questions on 'honour' based violence in the UK

IKWRO has produced a list of questions and answers to help dispel common myths and assumptions concerning 'honour' based violence in the UK. You can use this document to strengthen your own knowledge and understanding of 'honour' based violence or to help you communicate the issue to others.

### **What is 'honour' based violence?**

'Honour' based violence is predominantly committed against women. It is a crime or incident which is collectively planned and carried out by the victim's family, often with the involvement of others, in order to protect or restore the perceived 'honour' of the family and/or community. 'Honour' based violence takes many forms including forced marriage, forced suicide, acid attacks, mutilation, imprisonment and murder.

### **How big a problem is 'honour' based violence in the UK?**

There is no accurate data on how many women are affected by 'honour' based violence in the UK, although estimates go as high as 17,000 per year. At IKWRO we helped over 1500 women and girls last year, many of whom had experienced 'honour' based violence. The National Honour Helpline receives 7000 phone calls per year and the police in London alone recorded more than 250 incidents over six months in 2009. All of these figures suggest that the problem of 'honour' based violence is big and growing.

The lack of accurate data is part of the problem. Because the government doesn't understand how widespread the problem is, it's harder for them to really get to grips with it. IKWRO recommends that the government takes measures to develop an accurate assessment of 'honour' based violence.

### **Is this a cultural issue? Should we get involved?**

Under UK law violence against women and girls is a crime, and that includes 'honour' based violence. In addition under the international conventions our government has signed up to women and girls are entitled to protection from violence - that includes women from ethnic minority communities. It 'Honour' based violence is a violation of human rights which cannot be justified by reference to culture, religion or anything else. People in the UK wouldn't tolerate their friend or sister being forced into a marriage, imprisoned or even killed. Why should they tolerate these things happening to any woman?

### **Why can't women already get the help they need?**

In theory, women and girls facing 'honour' based violence should be able to get protection from the police, the social services, teachers or other professionals. In practice however, there are many barriers which stand in their way, including language, culture, fear of the authorities and a tendency among victims to underestimate the danger from their families. In addition, while awareness of the problem is growing among the police and other public bodies, we still see examples of very poor practice on a regular basis.

Women who we have worked with have been turned away by the police who either don't believe them or don't see this is a serious issue. In other cases police officers have broken police rules and



approached victims' families or spouses and disclosed details of the victim's whereabouts to their abusers. In another case a police interpreter broke confidentiality and disclosed details of an 'honour' based violence case to his family and the community.

In other cases social workers, nurses and staff in housing authorities have underestimated the risk to our clients and have put them in danger. Some housing authorities refuse to help clients who have had to leave home because of 'honour' based violence, arguing that they are 'voluntarily homeless'. When a woman or girl does tell someone what's happening to her, it may be her one and only opportunity to get help. In the cases above that opportunity has been missed. Luckily in all of these cases IKWRO was able to intervene and protect the woman or girl in question, but we can't reach everyone. That is why the government needs to lead, by improving the national response to 'honour' based violence.

### **What is the government doing already?**

In 2008 the government set up the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), where people at risk of forced marriage and those who have already been forced into a marriage can get advice and help. The Forced Marriage Unit has produced guidelines which should be followed by the police, teachers, social workers and others who might come into contact with forced marriage victims. The FMU is currently looking at whether these guidelines are being followed.

Also in 2008 the Association of Chief Police Officers released an 'Honour' Based Violence Strategy which included plans to deliver training to all police officers. This training is only now being put together by the National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA). However as the NPIA looks set to close under current government cuts it is not clear how the training will be rolled out to police officers.

### **What more can the UK government do?**

Training is needed not only by the police but by a whole range of public sector workers. The FMU guidelines, while very good, do not go into detail on other forms of 'honour' based violence. This gap needs to be filled. We are calling on the government to take a lead on making sure that training on 'honour' based violence is rolled out so that women and girls have a better chance of getting the help they need.

In addition, the government needs to get accurate data on how widespread the problem of 'honour' based violence is, and needs to develop a national strategy which will ensure that all government departments are doing what is needed in order to tackle 'honour' based violence. IKWRO has recommended putting in place a cross-government 'Honour' Based Violence Coordinator who could oversee this work.

### **Why are you campaigning? Shouldn't we just let the government get on with what they're doing?**

The national response to 'honour' based violence at present is piecemeal. In some areas the social services or police might be good at dealing with it. Unfortunately in others the service provided is shockingly poor, and as a result women and girls are being murdered, and many, many more are suffering abuse.

We want every woman or girl who needs help to get it. The best way to do this is to have a national strategy led by our government which addresses all the gaps. For more information about our campaign see [www.ikwro.org.uk](http://www.ikwro.org.uk).

